

For Everyone: An Outlook on the Ethical Crisis of Climate Change

By Cecil Hammett

In this paper, I aim to display global warming and climate change as not only a scientific problem and discussion but also one that is deeply rooted in ethics. I will look at a few emerging environmental issues such as climate change, global warming, and diminishing biodiversity to identify the ethical problems often shielded from the public. The removal of ethics from climate science has already impacted many of those within lower socioeconomic status due to both their lack of say in environmental policies, and the inaccessibility of means to curve the now visible effects (trash collection boats, chemical compromises). Additionally, the most significant effects of climate change will not alter our lives today; however, it will severely damage the quality of life for future generations of all living species. For most of the population, climate change is not yet visible in everyday life which, in turn, leads to the main counterargument. The premise of my argument begs the question by assuming that people should inherently believe that climate change is an ethical issue; yet, a substantial portion of the population either does not believe that climate change is real, or that current shifts in climate conditions are not a result of anthropological activity. Climate change is a matter that both affects and connects the entire planet because its impacts are and will be felt by everything on it. To create visible changes will require more than just a few advocates; our planet is not beyond saving. If one decides to deny climate change, potentially, this decision could lead to a worldwide catastrophe diminishing all or almost all life forms. The fault would be at the hands of the skeptics but the entire planet would suffer; however, if one accepts that climate change is real, we as a group can confront and understand fully the larger scale of both moral and political change we will undergo.

Emmanuel Kant describes in his book, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, his task is to find the supreme principle of morality, or what he would later call the categorical imperative. The categorical imperative states “So act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.”(14) Kant wants us to ask our self before we act if it would be right if this action were to become a universal law. By using this premise, the categorical imperative becomes highly applicable when viewing the impacts of anthropogenic activities on climate change. Universality and sustainability go hand in hand such that sustainable practices are ethically right because they can be universalized whereas unsustainable actions have the potential to lead to a planet-wide catastrophe; therefore, they are ethically wrong.

Peter Singer proposes a far different philosophy than Kant; however, his works provide a steady framework on why it is essential that we act now on our efforts to stop climate change. For Singer, climate change is an ethical issue for two reasons. First, climate change profoundly impacts the distribution of scarce, and in most cases, non-renewable resources. The locations of lowest socioeconomic status are already facing the consequences due to the lack of nonrenewable resources, like freshwater, because those of higher socioeconomic status are creating the problem by simple acts such as leaving the water on while brushing your teeth. The extension of ethics to the earth is not only a possibility for Singer but a necessity. Second, as a utilitarian, Singer proposes a philosophy where actions are right as long as they are with the best interest of the group and derive from reason. For the context of this paper, the group refers to all living things both human and non-human plants and animals. Moving towards sustainable actions is crucial to maintain the well-being of the group living today and future generations that are to come.

Kant provides a solid framework for the reason why sustainable actions should become a universal law; however, his argument becomes shaky when discussing this issue taking into consideration climate science skeptics. I intend to outline where the case needs adjustment to make it applicable for both the skeptic and the believer.

Every action that occurs on this earth impacts something or someone. In Singer's ethics, moral actions are derived from inherent human good. His philosophy is one that can be achieved, however it lacks recognition in a person's ability to become good rather than just inherently being good. To solve a problem like world hunger, we must first clean the mess that has been a significant impact to the problem. No matter where you are or what situation you are in it is an undeniable truth that everyone needs oxygen to breathe, water to drink, and a terrestrial environment with the ability to produce some form of nutrition. We cannot solve world hunger if the land is not feasible for farming.

Nietzsche says there is no one thing we know without objectivity. We can not separate our selves from our decisions. I agree that there are a few things we know without judgement. Sure in his argument he excludes basic human function however what about our relationship to the very thing that supplies us of our natural functions. We categorize natural functions and exclude them from ethics because they seem too universal, too basic, however, when we become deprived of them all our rationality and ability to be ethical cease our virtues abide by the categorical imperative is diminished as well. We become animals craving food, hallucinating, and in the worst cases of starvation turning against all central ideas and hopes for humanity and murdering each other for dinner. If the supplier of the thing that gives us life itself is dying do

we not eternally feel a need to save it. The answer in many situations would be an obvious yes.

Life derives from experiences hopes needs, choices changes, life is the beginning, life is why we are asking these questions but what is life if it has no where to take place. The planet is the center of ethics. It gives us the ability to care and make choices therefore internally we know that we shouldn't hurt her. People do not feel good when they litter, maybe it brings them no feelings at all but they do not feel good.

Do we have rational thinking that we aren't rationally thinking?